

positive note for working families and their kids who want to go to school but don't want to be burdened with the debt that is going to change their lives.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). Without objection, it is so ordered.

FACING CHALLENGES

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as we continue with what will likely be the final legislative week before the elections, it is a good time to take a look back at the year and take stock of where we are and what Congress has accomplished.

The House of Representatives, of course, has spent the past year legislating. Members of the House have sent literally hundreds of bills over to the Senate for consideration, including 40 jobs bills, many of which passed with bipartisan support in the House of Representatives.

Even now, in the final week before recessing for election season, the House is taking up two legislative packages, one focused on creating jobs and another focused on lowering the price of gas and groceries. Unfortunately, like so many other House bills, neither of these bills is likely to go anywhere in the Democratic leader's Senate because unlike the House, the Senate has not spent the past year taking up legislation to solve the many challenges facing American families. Instead, Senate Democrats have spent the past year taking up political gimmicks and designed-to-fail messaging bills they hope will win a few votes for them in November.

Back in March—earlier this year—the New York Times reported that Democrats planned to spend the spring and summer on messaging votes “timed to coincide with campaign-style trips by President Obama.”

The Times went on to say: “Democrats concede that making new laws is not really the point. Rather, they are trying to force Republicans to vote against them.” That is from the New York Times earlier this year, which was laying out and predicting what the Democrats' strategy was going to be for the balance of this year.

Unfortunately, Senate Democrats have followed that playbook pretty exactly. Again and again, Senate Democrats have bypassed serious legislation and chosen to bring up bills designed to win them votes with their far-left base or to smear Republicans in the November elections.

Take last week was an example. After an August recess beset by economic stagnation at home and crises

abroad, including, I might add, the murder of two American journalists at the hands of ruthless terrorist group ISIS, you might think Senate Democrats would want to spend our first week back focused on the challenges our Nation is facing.

Well, Mr. President, you would be wrong. Instead of legislation to address some of these challenges, Democrats chose to kick off this brief 2-week session with a bill to erase many of the speech protections of the First Amendment. That is right. Faced with crises abroad and a sluggish economy here at home, Democrats thought the most appropriate use of our time last week was legislation to erase parts of the First Amendment.

As with so many of the other bills they have brought up this year, Democrats knew this legislation did not have a chance of passing in the Senate. But they chose to bring it up anyway because they thought it might help get portions of their base out in November. And they swiftly followed it up with another designed-to-fail piece of legislation they hoped to use to criticize Republicans. In fact, the newspaper Roll Call reported earlier this week—this is from a story written about the Democrats' strategy: “Republicans should prepare to be criticized regardless of how they vote” on this particular bill. The article went on to quote an email that was sent to Democratic communicators which outlined plans, and again I quote, “to slam Republicans for either blocking the bill once again or for letting us on the bill only to slow down the rest of the Senate.”

So basically the message to Democratic communicators around here on Capitol Hill was to slam Republicans no matter how they voted. If they voted to get on the bill, slam them for slowing down the Senate so we cannot do other things. If they voted against getting on the bill, obviously, attack them for blocking the bill.

So here is the strategy, at this late hour of the game when we have so many big issues and challenges facing the country: It is simply to put bills on the floor that are designed to help Democrats in the fall elections and essentially to make Republicans look bad. That is a quote. That is a direct quote from an email that was sent out to Democratic communicators: “slam Republicans” no matter how they vote. Either way, take advantage of the situation. Try and play politics with it.

There is certainly a place for campaigning. There is certainly a place for politics. But the place for campaigning is not in the halls of Congress. Our job here in Washington is to pass legislation to address the challenges facing our country. And that job does not change if one party controls the House and the other party controls the Senate. The Senate and the House still have a responsibility to work together to get serious legislation to the President, and that is certainly what the House has tried to do.

The House has sent bill after bill to the Senate, many of them, as I mentioned earlier, bipartisan bills. They got strong bipartisan votes coming out of the House of Representatives. But again and again, Senate Democrat leaders have said no—no to working together, no to bipartisan House legislation, no to developing bipartisan solutions.

Senate Republicans' efforts have met a similar response. Again and again Republicans here in the Senate have put forward legislation to help create jobs, grow the economy, and to provide help to working families struggling with the high price of everything—from groceries to health care. Several of our bills have even received support from rank-and-file Democrats—bills such as Senator COLLINS' Forty Hours Is Full Time Act, which would fix an ObamaCare provision that is reducing workers' hours and wages, or Senator BLUNT's Hire More Heroes Act, which would give employers an incentive to hire our Nation's veterans.

But the Senate Democratic leadership has refused to consider our proposals.

Senate Republicans have even been prevented from offering amendments to bills that come before the Senate. Since July of 2013, Senate Republicans have been allowed just 14 amendment votes—less than one a month in the world's greatest deliberative body known for unlimited debate and unlimited amendment. Less than one amendment per month, that is what Senate Republicans have been allowed in the last year. Compare that to the House of Representatives where the Democrat minority has been allowed 194 amendment votes over the same period.

When the minority party is denied a voice in the Senate, it is the American people—the people whom we represent—who are really being denied a voice.

Democrats may not control the House, but through the amendment process, they have been able to make their constituents' voices heard. Republicans in the Senate, on the other hand, have been prevented from bringing their constituents' voices to the legislative process.

American families are struggling. The economy continues to stagnate. Unemployment is still above 6 percent—way higher than that if you figure in the labor participation rate the number of people who have actually given up even looking for work.

Last month's job creation was the worst this year, and opportunities for advancement in this economy are few and far between. Health care costs, which were already high when the President took office, have continued to increase. Average health care deductibles have increased 50 percent, and health care premiums have risen by an average of \$3,459 since the President took office, despite—despite—the President's promise that his health care law would drive down premiums by \$2,500. Gas prices have increased by

87 percent over the course of the Obama administration.

A Politico poll released this week found that “strong majorities now say that they lack the savings to grapple with an unforeseen job loss”—61 percent of the people in the poll said that—“and that the cost of basic household items like gas and groceries has strained their finances. . . .”—62 percent of the people polled had that response.

It is not surprising that a recent George Washington University/Battle-ground poll found that 70 percent of Americans think the country is “on the wrong track.”

With these challenges facing the American people, our focus in the Senate this year should have been legislation to address our struggling economy and to repair the damage ObamaCare is doing to families and businesses. Instead, Senate Democrats have chosen to focus the Senate’s efforts on politics. The Democrat-led Senate has failed in its most basic responsibility this year; and that is to pass solutions for the American people.

With just a few days left in the session, it is a little late for Democrats to do anything about that now.

I hope that when we return in November things will be different. I hope Democrats will spend less time trying to save their jobs and more time trying to create jobs for the American people. I hope they will spend less time campaigning and more time legislating. I hope they will be ready to work with Republicans to deliver solutions for the American people.

That is what we are here to do. That is what we ought to be focused on. All this using the floor of the Senate to conduct campaigns doesn’t serve any constructive purpose when it comes to solving problems and meeting the challenges being faced by the American people every single day—chronic high employment, a sluggish economy, reduced take-home pay, higher costs for health care, groceries, fuel, college education, we go right down the list. These are the real and present impacts of this economy on the American people and middle-class families.

Congress can do better. The American people deserve better. I hope when the dust settles and the smoke clears from the November elections, we will come back with a renewed sense of purpose and focus on what is truly important to the people we represent.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

SPENDING AND DEBT

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, as we consider this continuing resolution to fund the Federal Government in fiscal year 2015, which begins October 1, I rise to voice concern about our Nation’s spending and debt. At last count our country was more than \$17 trillion in debt, and that number increases every single day.

My parents told me you shouldn’t just complain, you should have solutions, and I am going to talk about two solutions.

One is the Penny Plan, which would cut 1 cent out of every dollar we currently spend and, according to the Congressional Budget Office, balance the budget in just 3 years. If we continued it for another 7 years, we would reduce spending by \$7.6 trillion.

Another solution would be to do biennial budgeting. We obviously don’t have time to look through the budget—we keep doing continuing resolutions and then we do an omnibus bill. We are supposed to do those through 12 separate bills—12 separate bills that get debated not just in committee but on the floor of the Senate with amendments. It has been a long time since we have done that. So biennial budgeting would allow us to get into this nerve center of spending and get something done.

For fiscal year 2014, we expect to pay \$231 billion in interest on the national debt according to the Congressional Budget Office. With our pattern of unsustainable spending, in 10 years we could pay close to \$800 billion in interest. That is not counting the interest rate going up. Now, \$231 billion this year at 1 percent is about what we are paying, but imagine if that went to 5 percent. That would put us over \$1 trillion. That is what we are talking about spending in this continuing resolution, and if we are doing it all on interest, that eliminates defense and all the other things we put our money into. That is more to our creditors than we currently spend on national defense.

Our future interest payments would be even higher if interest goes up more than CBO has predicted. The interest we pay on our debt doesn’t buy anything. A large portion of that just pays other countries for loaning us money.

The Federal Government consistently spends billions more than it takes in, and the CBO reported in August that if current laws remain unchanged, growing budget deficits over the long term will push the debt even higher. Yet today we are considering legislation to continue discretionary funding on autopilot.

The continuing resolution funds Federal programs through December 11, 2014, at the current annual rate of \$1.012 trillion. We will not have any debate. We will have an up-or-down vote and spend another \$1 trillion. The legislation does nothing to address the CBO projection that our ratio of public debt to gross domestic product—that is everything our economy earns in the United States—will reach 74 percent by the end of this fiscal year, twice that of just 7 years ago and higher than any year since 1950.

We are doing nothing to reverse CBO’s projection that in 25 years Federal debt held by our constituents will exceed 100 percent of gross domestic product—again, everything we produce in the United States in 1 year. The CBO notes that this trend, which I view as

perilous, cannot be sustained indefinitely.

I ask my Senate colleagues what would happen if we as individuals adopted the same spending habits held by the government. I can tell them with little doubt that over the long term we would each face bankruptcy, and that is the point. Sometimes it seems we have our heads buried in the sand. Are we in denial? Sometimes we act as if there are different sets of principles for the Federal budget and the outcome of excessive personal spending. But I am here to tell you, the same potentially dire consequences face the government that face individuals if we do not put our fiscal house in order.

Our President often frames issues in the context of how it would affect his daughters. Similar to the President, at times I am up at night with concerns about how our country’s fiscal path will affect the lives of my children and grandchildren. I worry about how our debt will harm families and generations to come.

Sometimes as lawmakers we seem to act as if this problem is too big to solve, but it is not. Understanding how to reach and maintain financial health is not rocket science. It merely requires exercising common sense and commitment.

As individuals we learn to live within our means. If we spend too much, we tighten our belts and we work hard to ease our financial situation. The government should and could do the same. We can’t wait longer. It is time for us to act.

I have introduced the Penny Plan as a simple and straightforward way to put our country back on the right fiscal path. It reduces discretionary and mandatory spending, less net interest payments, by 1 percent—or 1 penny for every dollar—for each year of 3 years until total spending has reached approximately 18 percent of gross domestic product. Based on figures from the CBO, reducing spending this way will result in a balanced budget within 3 years. Total spending would then be capped at 18 percent for subsequent years since that is the historic average level of government spending for the past several decades.

Importantly, the Penny Plan steers us away from some of the controversial and political traps we have seen for spending reductions. At the onset, it does not identify the specific cuts that are necessary to achieve this 1-percent reduction in savings. Instead, such decisions are left for us to make. Its beauty is it puts a broad plan into action and gives flexibility.

I have had a lot of grassroots interest in this. I have had a number of organizations that have done resolutions. I have a lot of individuals who have signed up on my Web site as cosponsors of the action that is needed to be taken. I encourage people to go to my Web site and become a part of this movement to show there is interest in balancing the budget and in paying down the debt.